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ABSTRACT

Approximately every ten years, all academic departments at Randolph-Macon Woman's College (RMWC) are required to conduct a departmental review. This review entails documenting and reflecting upon a number of factors including curriculum, staffing, workload, student success, enrollment, assessment, and facilities with the input of off campus evaluators to provide a needed perspective. The goal is to reflect upon the achievements and goals of the department and in turn strengthen the academic program. This paper discusses how this type of review allowed the psychology department to compare the structure of the RMWC curriculum to the APA goals and outcomes set forth for undergraduate psychology programs. (GCP)

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A Departmental Perspective on APA goals and outcomes for Undergraduate Psychology Programs

Approximately every 10 years, all academic departments at Randolph-Macon Woman's College are required to conduct a departmental review. This review entails documenting and reflecting upon a number of factors including curriculum, staffing, workload, student success, enrollment, assessment, and facilities, with the input of off campus evaluators to provide a needed perspective. The goal, of course after what is often a yearlong process, is to reflect upon the achievements and goals of the department and in turn strengthen the academic program. It was this type of review that allowed our department the opportunity to compare the structure of our curriculum to the APA goals and outcomes set forth for undergraduate psychology programs (Halonen, Appleby, Brewer, Buskist, Gillem, Halpern, Hill, Lloyd, Rudmann, Whitlow, Beins, & Braswell, 2002). Honestly, it was this type of review that led the faculty in my department to stumble upon the APA goals and outcomes discussed here today.

Departments at R-MWC are required to conduct annual reviews between these in depth studies. The format for these annual reviews has only been in use for about four years now. Until recently, much less formal reviews were in place, in which each department simply listed curricular changes, staffing changes, and needs of the department. For example, the Psychology Department would meet informally and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of seniors' performance on their research projects and make adjustments in the curriculum to address those perceptions. More recently, following preparation for a reaccreditation visit from SACS (the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools), it was determined that a more formal annual assessment process

within each department was needed in addition to the in depth reviews. This assessment process led to specific goals set forth by faculty members within each department, tying these goals to the College's mission statement.

Using the Nichol's (1995) hypothesis testing model, each department is asked to create predictions concerning student outcomes, create a measure of that prediction, evaluate those predictions, and make necessary changes when the goals are not reached.

Let me first give you some background on the history of our department, then describe the structure and goals of our curriculum, and then tie the structure and goals to the APA goals and outcomes and how we came to use them during our departmental review.

The main goal for the R-MWC psychology department, before the more formal review process began, and really when the department was founded in 1893, was and is to develop students' abilities to conduct research and understand the research process. Celestia Parrish, a student of Tichener's with laboratory equipment that could fit in a single desk drawer and an enormous budget of $25, founded our department at the time of the founding of the College in 1893. She began the tradition of training students in the scientific process and founded the laboratory at the time when psychology laboratories were not common in the U.S. and. From 1893 until the present day, the faculty are not interested in developing cognitive psychologists, social psychologists, or physiological psychologists. Rather, we want our students to understand the research process in the discipline, and possess the knowledge to perhaps continue their education at the graduate level in a particularly area of psychology they are most interested, and in the end possess the skills needed to understand the literature in the field, develop their own hypotheses,

know how to test those hypotheses, interpret their findings, and communicate those findings to others. We think that these same skills will serve a student well if they choose to pursue graduate work in the field or enter another career track.

Given our discussion here today, we are now well aware of the learning goals and outcomes proposed by the task force with the first set of goals focused on the science and application of psychology and the second set focused on general education. On to how we compared our departmental curriculum with these goals and outcomes.

What does our curriculum look like? Our students begin with a two semester Introduction to Psychology sequence, providing a thorough introduction to the theory and content of psychology. Students can then extend their knowledge of theory and content about at least one area of psychology when they take a required elective from a selection of 200 level courses. Students who major in psychology are also required to take a research methods sequence. These two courses are typically taken in the sophomore year and they serve as prerequisites for 300 level courses, with the first of the sequence focused on statistics and the second course focused on research design. Psychology majors further hone their research skills and deepen their knowledge of specific content areas of the discipline when they take one of four laboratory courses. These courses are typically completed during the junior year or in the first semester of the senior year and include Sensation and Perception, Cognitive Psychology, Physiological Psychology, and Advanced Social Psychology. Each laboratory section provides students with practice at the research process, especially the analyzing, interpreting, and presenting of data. A history of psychology course is also required of all majors, typically taken during the junior year given the prerequisite of 15 hours in psychology courses. Finally, students are

required to complete the two-semester Senior Seminar in General Psychology as a capstone course. Here we focus on the production of student-designed research, in which students work in small groups with a faculty advisor to design and execute a research study. The assessment of our program is based in part on student's performance when presenting their work at a regional conference, where faculty from other institutions rate the student's presentation and research using a series of likert scales. Implementation of this curriculum is accomplished with 5 full-time and 1 part-time member of the department.

Remember, for the assessment process, the College requires that we assess our curriculum in terms of the College's mission statement. Our mission statement includes the need for programs to foster capacities including the ability to think critically, write and speak with clarity and accuracy, employ quantitative reasoning, using technology effectively and ethically, approach problems with creativity and imagination, work both independently and collaboratively, and recognize the power and limitations of knowledge. With a curriculum focused on developing researchers, it was very easy to connect the structure and goals of our courses to this mission. These capacities are inherent in any curriculum focusing on the development of good researchers.

When asked to conduct our 10 year departmental review, we were asked not only how does our curriculum match the mission of the College, but also how does it fit with the current trends/thoughts within the discipline?

Next, we asked ourselves, do the proposed learning goals and outcomes and our curriculum fit together? We were very pleased to determine that in fact many of the

learning goals and outcomes were indeed already in place in our curriculum and have been for quite some time.

Our two semester introductory course as well as our 200 and 300 level electives and history requirement clearly covers goal 1, knowledge base of psychology, in which students are provided with theory and content at all levels of course work.

The lab component of our introductory course as well as the two- semester methods sequence at the 200-level begins to develop our students' research skills. The two methods courses are typically taken in the sophomore year and they serve as prerequisites for 300 level courses. In the first in the sequence, Research Methods I, students focus on applied statistics, during which time they also construct an annotated bibliography on a topic of their choosing. In Research Methods II, students focus on learning the principles of research design. They also continue to work on the topic chosen during the first course, learning to write in APA styles a research proposal based on this topic. This sequence of courses as well as our 300 level lab course and senior research requirement supports, research methods in psychology, which states that students will understand and apply basic research methods in psychology including design, data analysis, and interpretation as well as goal 3, critical thinking skills in psychology.

Our research methods sequence also includes continuous discussion of ethical standards for research, in turn allowing students to develop values in psychology as stated by goal 5. These discussions also continue in our history course as well as in senior seminar.

In addition, starting in methods and continuing throughout the upper level courses, students learn to conduct data analyses with SPSS and to conduct searches of the

databases that reference the psychological literature, in addition to required use of many office tools. By completing these tasks in methods and upper level courses, students develop their "information competence and ability to use computers, as stated by goal 6, information and technological literacy.

The APA style research proposal that students create in the methods sequence and in senior seminar, the many writing assignments in all 300 level experimental courses, in addition to the college wide emphasis on writing and speaking which includes evaluation of both skills in every course on campus, allows development of our students, communication skills, goal 7. During their senior year, our students are also required to present their research ideas and results both in class as well as at a regional conference.

The learning goals stated in 8, 9, and 10 are achieved for the most part at R-MWC outside the psychology curriculum. Given our diverse student population (with 25% representing diverse population), which includes women from 45 different countries and the requirement to live on campus, our students should inherently develop the goals stated in goal 8, sociocultural and international awareness. In addition, our general education program to be implemented in fall of 2002 includes a requirement titled global awareness.

Finally, campus support services provided by residential life staff, the learning resource center, and the career development office provide students with guidance for both personal development (goal 9) and career planning and development (goal 10). Our advising system also supports these goals, with each student meeting individually with their academic advisor throughout the year to discuss their academic program as well as these issues.

As stated in the report, if used during reviews of undergraduate curriculum across the country, these learning goals and outcomes could provide an effective way in which to ensure "consistent, high quality undergraduate programs..." During the review process, we came to realize that our particular focus on the understanding of the research process, did not provide much in the curriculum focused on goal 4, application of psychology. While our students often take advantage of the internships available, and can take elective courses with clear application such as developmental and social, and the applied nature of many senior research projects, this is indeed a small emphasis in our curriculum.

How are psychology faculty aware that this invaluable set of goals and outcomes exist? In our case, one member of department came across the document not in order to obtain a resource for our review, but rather in response to a request to provide feedback on the report. When beginning our review, he realized the value of this document in the review process, providing us with an external check of our curriculum. In turn, we were able to compare our departmental goals and outcomes with the goals and outcomes as stated in this report to determine what aspects of our curriculum are in line with those at other institutions and what changes might be needed in order to strengthen our program. Without this report we would have simply compared what we offered to that of similar institutions and read the description of departmental goals as described in course catalogues and departmental websites. However, this information was already made available by members of the task force who developed the learning goals and outcomes described in the report and provided a clear organization. I strongly encourage all faculty about to embark on a department review to use this resource to their advantage. Don't

reinvent the wheel. Importantly, using this report does not dictate to faculty what their curriculum should look like, but rather provides guidelines to use in order to determine how to strengthen an existing program that fits with the departmental goals and expectations at any given institution.

We look forward to the challenges that lie ahead, as we attempt to assess our success related to the goals and outcomes and continue to develop our program to address those goals not fully addressed in our current program.

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